



2010 SUMMIT ON HEALTH, NUTRITION AND OBESITY: ACTIONS FOR HEALTHY LIVING

WATER CONSUMPTION IN SCHOOLS: INCREASE ACCESS TO FREE DRINKING WATER DURING SCHOOL MEALTIMES

“I want to take what was discussed at the Summit and turn our state goals into action that will attack obesity on every level and create a healthy foundation for California’s future.” (Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, 2010 Summit On Health, Nutrition And Obesity, 2/24/10)

Action:

Senate Bill 1413 (Leno), sponsored by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, has been introduced to require school districts to make free, fresh drinking water available in school food service areas by January 1, 2012.

California Context:

Schools are under pressure to improve student academic performance and research shows that adequate hydration is necessary for improved brain function. Dehydration is associated with impaired cognitive function and can adversely affect memory, reasoning, hand-eye coordination, concentration, alertness, attention, perception, and language skills. Experts note that inadequate hydration at school leaves students at risk of experiencing headaches, lack of concentration, and digestive problems that can adversely affect their performance as well as their general well-being.

In addition, research indicates that increasing student water consumption may be an effective tool to address obesity. Replacing sugar sweetened beverages, like soda or sports drinks, with water has been associated with reduced calorie consumption and increased weight loss in adults.

Despite the importance of water to student health, schools are not currently required to provide free water in food service areas and often students do not have access to free water during their mealtimes. In a recent survey of the state’s public schools conducted by California Project LEAN in collaboration with the California Department of Education, nearly 40 percent of responding districts reported not offering free drinking water in food service areas. And while schools are required to provide one drinking fountain per 150 students, there is no requirement for fountains in food service areas.

Success Stories:

Many schools in California are already using innovative strategies to provide free, safe water in school food service areas. The El Monte Union High School District provides 8-ounce bottled water as part of its meal service, and in the Berkeley Unified School District, schools supply paper cups and fill 5-gallon containers with water during meal time. Experience shows that the cost of implementing free water programs is relatively inexpensive. In the Los Angeles Unified School District, the provision of free water costs the district \$2,000 per site annually (\$1.20 per student per year), which includes the cost of lead tests, water filters, 5-gallon dispensers, and cups. The Folsom-Cordova, Oakland, and Hayward Unified school districts have also installed filtered “hydration stations” in cafeterias at a cost of \$2,000-\$3,000 per site.